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Dick Collins

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## The Children of the Night: Stoker's Dreadful Reading and the Plot of Dracula

### Cover Page Footnote

A graduate of Cambridge (Trinity), Dr. Collins has produced editions of two Penny Dreadfuls (The String of Pearls and Wagner the Were-wolf) with a third (The Necromancer) forthcoming. Retired, he lives in County Cork, Ireland

# **The Children of the Night: Stoker's Dreadful Reading and the Plot of *Dracula***

**Dick Collins**

[A graduate of Cambridge (Trinity), Dr. Collins has produced editions of two Penny Dreadfuls (*The String of Pearls* and *Wagner the Were-wolf*) with a third (*The Necromancer*) forthcoming. Retired, he lives in County Cork, Ireland.]

My intention is to suggest that the plot of *Dracula* was modeled on the plot of *The String of Pearls*, the Penny Dreadful serial that created Sweeney Todd. I am not suggesting that Stoker deliberately or consciously “stole” the plot and “rewrote it” with “differences”; nor can I prove he had read it, let alone that he had it on the desk as he wrote. Instead I am making the altogether more ordinary claim that Stoker was familiar with the earlier book, and others like it; that the memory of it provided him with a basic framework of plot; and that, since a plot can only be acted out by characters, the framework he took from *Pearls* provided him with certain basic protagonists.<sup>1</sup>

## **Sweeney Todd and the critics**

*The String of Pearls* first appeared as a weekly serial in *The People's Periodical and Family Library*, published by Edward Lloyd of Salisbury Square, off Fleet Street, in the City of London. The first episode came out on 21 November 1846, and the serial ran for eighteen weeks. With its poor print and lurid illustrations it was a typical Dreadful, though in writing a distinct cut above the rest. It introduced the monstrous Sweeney Todd, barber of Fleet Street. In 1850 Lloyd started to re-run it, but it was so popular that, as was usual with Dreadfuls, he paid someone to expand it and keep it going. The work was probably done by J.M. Rymer, and *Pearls* grew from 39 chapters to 173, and from 18 weekly parts to 92; the former tight structure was swamped with new incidents. The original serial was not published in book form until 2005. By long tradition it was attributed to Thomas Peckett Prest (Lloyd's chief plagiarist of Dickens and Ainsworth) of whom very little is known.<sup>2</sup>

The study of Penny Dreadfuls is a neglected field. It did not emerge from anecdote and collectors' lore until the interwar years, when it was treated by that worst of critics, Montague Summers. His *Gothic Bibliography* is chaotic and inaccurate, and when he comes to Prest he loses all contact with fact. He gets the title of the book wrong, as well as the edition in which it first appears; hopelessly confuses the first and second versions; attributes the original work to George MacFarren, who died before it was written; adds a detailed, circumstantial and fictitious account of why MacFarren never finished it; confuses Prest the hack-writer with an Epping tobacconist of similar (but not identical) name; ascribes to him the editing of sermons not written until after he was dead; dates the dramatic adaptation of the book six years before the book was published; and spends more time on a supposed French antecedent of the real Todd than he does on the actual text. Unreliable even for titles and dates, Summers is still quoted avidly by many critics who follow

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<sup>1</sup> I must mention Elizabeth Miller's masterly demolition of much former “scholarship” on *Dracula*. It is an application of Ockham's Razor in the strongest sense: that speculations should not be made without facts to support them. I hope that what I have to say is not unsupported invention, but I will take issue with one point she makes: that Stoker came up with an “original plot” (51). I hope to make a reasonable argument that he made original use of a pre-existing tale.

<sup>2</sup> What is known is that Prest died of TB in Islington in 1859, at the age of 49, and was buried in a pauper's grave (Public Grave M3 2056) in the St. Pancras and Islington Cemetery. He was probably born in Hackney, Middlesex, in 1809; his father came from Lancashire, and his mother may have been from Cambridgeshire (1852 UK census). There is no indication that he was married.

him, and his errors – at times his mendacities – are passed on to further generations.

Of an entirely different stamp is E.S. Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys*, a book with far less ambition than Summers' that achieves far more. One of the world's most delightful reads, it is an object lesson in how to hook people on your subject. Turner devotes a whole chapter to Todd, and on the whole his facts are correct; however, he does claim there are thirty-seven chapters in the book (there are thirty-nine, although they are misnumbered) and that Todd disappears for three-quarters of the book (he does not). But to carp at Turner's occasional inaccuracies is churlish and ungrateful: the book has done more for Dreadful studies than anything else. A more substantial gripe is that the scope of the book is narrower than one would like: it is not criticism as such, but a history of the genre, or rather a *chronique scandaleuse*. But, perhaps, so much the better.

Peter Haining combines many of Turner's virtues with all of Summers' vices, producing books that are usually greatly entertaining, and often wildly misleading. His *Sweeney Todd: The Real Story of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* assumes Todd was a real person, and proceeds accordingly. It is impossible to tell whether the book is a poker-faced joke or a seriously-meant botch-up. A full biography is invented for Todd; mention of the book in which he first appeared is relegated to a mere page and a bit. Haining's pronouncements should be treated with extreme caution, but again we are missing the point: Haining is an entertainer rather than a critic, and deserves praise for his many anthologies of Gothic and Dreadful stories. (Even here, let the reader beware: the only story he collects and ascribes to Prest, "The Demon of the Hartz," is in fact by Walter Scott – an unforgivable mistake.)

Devendra Varma's *The Gothic Flame* is based very closely on Summers' *Gothic Quest*; it goes straight past the Penny Dreadful without mention. Varma's introduction to the facsimile edition of another Dreadful, *Varney the Vampyre*, gives much information about vampires in India, but nothing useful about the book, which he ascribes to Thomas Preskett Prest. Christopher Frayling repeats Varma's error (145), and Alison Milbank further reduces it to Thomas Preskett, dispensing with the surname altogether. Milbank's quaint and original "take" on the early Victorian Gothic is that writers took it upon themselves to offer advice to the new and very young Queen (145-66). One wonders what she was supposed to learn from *The String of Pearls*?

One of the few people to write about Dreadfuls both in learned fashion and at length is Louis James. His *Fiction for the Working Man* is a sociological and historical rather than literary account, but one does get the impression that, unlike so many, James has done his work and actually *read* some Dreadfuls. He gives a fascinating and detailed account of his subject; but his account of Sweeney Todd is confused, mixing versions and editions until they are unrecognizable.

Recently there has been some excitement about an attempted re-attribution of *The String of Pearls* from Prest to J.M. Rymer. Helen R. Smith found an advertisement in the fly-leaf of another Lloyd title, saying that *Pearls* was by the author of *Ada, the Betrayed*, which we know to be Rymer. The problem here is that the link is very clearly to the 1850 edition, *The String of Pearls; or, The Sailor's Gift*, and not to the original: this title refers only to the later edition, and the earlier never bore it. It does not rule out Rymer having worked on the original; Lloyd's practice of encouraging multiple authorship, through his use of hacks, suggests that both Rymer and Prest *might* have had a hand in it, and no doubt a couple of others as well. It probably does mean that Rymer worked on the later edition. But the theory that he originated the story should be handled with kid-gloves until there is further and better evidence. This is a small glitch in an otherwise excellent book, sadly restricted to bibliographical problems.

To date there has been no full-scale study of Penny Dreadfuls, and such references as are made to them tend to be a few sentences long, if that. But there is a growing interest, some of which is entering the academic field. Modern editions are tragically few, meaning that scholars are rarely able to read much of the primary material. Trefor Thomas produced an excellent abridgement of G.W.M. Reynolds' *Mysteries of London* in 1996, but it is a heavy cutting down of the original, unwieldy though that was. Wordsworth Editions brought out *The String of Pearls*, and are following it with Reynold's *Wagner the Wehr-wolf* and *The Necromancer*. With Haining's efforts

at anthology and a couple of scanty web sites,<sup>3</sup> that virtually completes the reading available. Most of even that is out of print.

### A pre-emptive summary

Here are the basic resemblances between *Dracula* and *The String of Pearls*:

1. A young man, a solicitor, goes abroad on business.
2. The young man's character is depressive and despairing.
3. He is preparing to marry.
4. He has left his fiancée behind in England.
5. The fiancée too is at first passive and despairing.
6. His ultimate employer is a cannibalistic Monster.
7. The Monster has female accomplice(s).
8. The Monster kills by attacking the victims' throats.
9. The young man is imprisoned by his employer in a terrifying maze of tunnels and corridors.
10. He explores the maze and makes terrible finds.
11. His fiancée despairs of his return.
12. His fiancée has a flighty female friend.
13. There are three suitors, who join together to find the Monster and destroy him.
14. There is an older, wiser man who leads the quest.
15. There is a mad-house, where the allies have a friend and helper.
16. The Monster also has a helper there.
17. The Monster has a lair in London.
18. The fiancée enters the Monster's lair, seemingly to help him, in fact to work against him.
19. The Older Man enters the lair to attack the evil, while the fiancée waits outside.

In the original 1847 version, Todd is captured and hanged at Tyburn. In the 1850 expansion, the following episodes are added:

20. On being chased by the allies, the Monster flees England by boat.
21. Chased by the allies, the Monster is caught on the open road.
22. The Monster is killed by the allies.
23. He is killed in the open whilst escaping.

We can fill out the characters as follows (*Pearls* first in all cases):

24. Vapid solicitor hero: Mark Ingestrie, Jonathan Harker.
25. Fiancée: Johanna Oakley, Mina Murray.
26. Flighty friend: Arabella Wilmott, Lucy Westenra.
27. Suitors: Col. Jefferey, Rev. Lupin, Ben Bolt; Holmwood, Seward, Morris.
28. Cannibalistic monster: Sweeney Todd, Count Dracula.
29. Monster's female ally: Mrs Lovett, three vampire women.
30. Helper in madhouse: The Mad Woman, Renfield.
31. Monster's ally in Madhouse: Mr. Fogg, Renfield.

These are complicated if we add Tobias Ragg, Todd's boy-apprentice, who has many of the functions and attributes of Ingestrie/Harker:

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: "The Literary Gothic": [www.litgothic.com](http://www.litgothic.com) and "Penny Dreadfuls": [www.geocities.com/justgilb](http://www.geocities.com/justgilb)

- 32 Prisoner due to trade: apprentice barber, solicitor.
- 33 Search of lair: while Todd is away, while Count is sleeping.
- 34 Fiancée: Minna Grey, Mina Murray.
- 35 Abandoned to fate: locked up in mad-house, locked up in castle.
- 36 Warns others: escapes from mad-house, escapes from castle.

Tobias and Ingestrie are thus conflated to form a single character. Conversely Johanna Oakley cedes certain of her roles to the Flighty Friend. This need not concern us. In Harold Bloom's phrase Stoker has "cleared the creative space" to use his own fertile imaginings and make a new thing of the old. The enormous differences between the two books need not worry us either. Todd is a Londoner, the Count a Transylvanian; *Pearls* is set entirely in London, with no mention or room for Carpathian folklore, or even Whitby.<sup>4</sup> But 36 points of major similarity make, I think, a fairly strong case for a connection between the two books.

### General similarities

The Stoker papers show that he worked to a fairly common pattern for a novel that is long in the writing: large amounts of information are gathered, great plans are made, many pages covered; much of this is discarded, more information is gathered and more plans made; the final product is a bare fraction of all the work that went into it. Names and plot-lines change over the years. Projected characters – such as the detective inspector and Kate Reed – are conflated with others or fall out altogether, and the first segment, containing many arrangements for Harker's journey and incidents during it, is dropped entirely. Stoker seems to have had a talent for over-planning, but fortunately an equal and opposite one for honing his material to the manageable and the readable.

We learn to write novels by reading them; this process of expansion-contraction can be seen as bringing the initial impulse to write into line with Stoker's idea of what a novel should be. That idea was formed by his reading:

During an interview with Jane Stoddard in July 1897, he said that he had "always been interested in the vampire legend" and that "the knowledge of vampire superstitions shown in *Dracula* was gathered from a great deal of miscellaneous reading." (Miller 24)

The origin of the novel is in *The Novel*. It is safe to assume that Stoker would have had some familiarity with at least some "good" contemporary popular writing, such as Dickens, Le Fanu, Braddon, Ainsworth and Collins, and it would be surprising if a literate, middle-class family like his did not occasionally take *All The Year Round*, *The Dublin University Magazine* or *Blackwood's*, or something of the sort. Christopher Frayling has shown convincingly that part of Stoker's reading was probably *Varney the Vampyre; or, the Feast of Blood*; indeed he rather understates his case (see below). If Stoker had always been interested in vampires, one of the few places he could have found stuff of interest during his childhood would have been in the pages of a *Dreadful*.<sup>5</sup> As a boy, and possibly later, Stoker would have had some interest in boys' fiction, and read at least some of it. (We should not be surprised, either, if he does not admit to it as a grown man.) That he was a sickly child makes it more likely that he was a reader, as was the case with

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<sup>4</sup> In fact there is a shipwreck in *The String of Pearls*, and it is set in foreign climes, but it is a recollection of Colonel Jefferey's, and is probably an interpolation.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to deny that vampire stories, or rather vampire-like stories, are not found commonly in Ireland; there is a most unpleasant tale associated with our local Protestant graveyard in Baile Bhúirne. The fact remains that such stories are very dissimilar to *Dracula*, and the tales found in *Penny Dreadfuls* are very similar. In passing, the word *drochfhola*, suggested by Haining and Tremayne as an origin for *Dracula*, means "of bad blood, enmity"; it has no connection at all with vampirism. It is also a possessive form, or an adjective, not a name.

Stevenson.

It follows that, when he came to write a Gothic romance, Stoker may have taken as model one of the works he had already read in that genre.

Let us look at the opening episode of *Dracula*. Hoping to marry, Jonathan Harker, a solicitor, goes on a mission to a far-off land to convey a house to Count Dracula. Dracula is a bizarre and frightening man, and Harker soon finds himself a prisoner in his castle. The castle is vast and awful, with many passages and secret rooms. Sinister but alluring women collude in his imprisonment, and there are awful hints of cannibalism. The Count abandons him to his fate, but Harker manages to escape and return to England to his fiancée. Here is the corresponding opening of *The String of Pearls*. Hoping to marry, a young man, a failed solicitor, goes on a business-voyage to a far-away land. Returning to England, with nothing, he takes a job with a sinister but alluring woman. He finds himself a prisoner in the maze of cellars beneath her shop, forced to perform work that he discovers has hints of cannibalism. The woman's bizarre and frightening accomplice is planning to flee and leave her to the law; but the young man escapes and is returned to his fiancée.

The heroines have strong resemblances. Both are anxiously awaiting the return of their missing fiancé; both have a flighty friend; one of these two is courted by three men; both heroines nurse their fiancés back to health; both enter the Monster's lair; and both link the monster to the allies. Of course, Stoker has played extremely free with his model, as a good writer should; the women are a confusion of Johanna, Arabella and Minna seen from one direction, Mina and Lucy from the other. But the basic pattern is there, with the bonus that Minna and Mina have such obviously similar names: Minna Grey being taken directly from Minne Grey, the heroine of Scott's *The Surgeon's Daughter*.<sup>6</sup> The monsters are linked very clearly: both are cannibalistic; kill by attacking their victims' throats; have female allies, and a further ally in a mad-house; have secret lairs in London; (after 1850) are both shipwrecked on the English coast; both attempt flight, and both meet their death in the open.

It is no narrow structural resemblance, therefore, between *Dracula* and *The String of Pearls*. In both, a group of people ally themselves against a monster, and the structure of the group is similar: there is a brave heroine (Johanna Oakley, Mina Murray), a plucky young man (Mark Ingestrie/Tobias Ragg, Jonathan Harker), a wise older man (Sir Richard Blunt the magistrate, Van Helsing), and a rejected suitor (Colonel Jefferey, Ben Bolt/ Rev. Lupin, Seward, and Morris). To get near to the monster, the heroine enters his world, Johanna by her disguise of the apprentice-boy Charlie Greene, Mina by hypnotic link. The monster is pursued over land and sea, and destroyed just as he seems to have escaped. As well as the searches mentioned above, other scenes have their analogues: the scene in the Chapel at Carfax with the scene below St. Dunstan's church; even the mad-house appears in both. The character of one actor in one book bears a close resemblance to her or his analogue in the other book. Once you have read both books together, the impression of similarity is weighty indeed.

### **The Dreadful and the Gothic**

There are thousands of Penny Dreadfuls, and they vary greatly in subject matter, style, length and quality. They are not a separate and specific genre, rather they imitate and steal from many, but there are clear signs that one is reading a Dreadful rather than, say, an old-fashioned Gothic novel, a Newgate or a Silver-Fork novel. The key is, as James said, the different readership the Dreadful expected. The Gothic was aimed chiefly at literate, middle-class women, idle as to work, who could afford to subscribe to a three-volume novel, or at the very least to a circulating library: Jane Austen and John Keats were among such readers, though I suppose not typical of them. For those who could not afford two guineas a time there was a flourishing trade in cheap, truncated

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<sup>6</sup> In his Notes for *Dracula*, Stoker occasionally misspells "Mina" as "Minna." [Ed. note]

plagiarisms, the “chap-books” or “blue-books.” The Dreadful publisher Edward Lloyd tested new titles on the ten year-old boys and girls who worked in his print-room or in his kitchen; most often it had to be read to them. These could spare a penny a week for a “comic,” and many probably formed impromptu circulating libraries of their own, each member buying an issue and then passing it around her friends. The majority of Lloyd’s titles seem to be aimed at girls rather than boys.

The differences between Gothic and Dreadful all stem from this “downward” shift:

1. There is a marked change of linguistic register, from the eighteenth century high-style to the more demotic English of Scott, Ainsworth and Dickens. The older style is still remembered, especially when the heroines get emotional, so that many Dreadfuls seem to imitate the creaking, uneven style of Bulwer-Lytton. Literary references are fewer, and to the better-known authors such as Shakespeare and Byron.
2. There is a corresponding “fall” in the social class of the characters. Where the classic Gothic is upper-middle-class, if not aristocratic, the Dreadful heroine is working-class, at most lower-trade (for example, an apprentice girl, a spectacle-maker’s daughter) and very often a peasant on the land. The typical hero, when not a criminal, is an apprentice, a sailor, sometimes a solicitor.
3. The ubiquitous Gothic device of the Lost Heiress becomes far less common. Where it is used the girl is usually a peasant, a beggar or an apprentice-girl. These stories (for example *Ela*, *The Outcast*; *Ada, the Betrayed*; *Fatherless Fanny*; *Mary Clifford*) are a very large part of the Dreadful canon, and by far the least studied.
4. The long passages of inaction and description, mostly of scenery, that are found in the Gothic disappear. The emphasis in the Dreadful is on action, the more catastrophic the better, and new incidents are made to follow each other as fast as possible.
5. Rather than a lost inheritance, the plot revolves more around a villain, who must be unmasked and destroyed. Too often for Victorian tastes, the villain is the true hero of the tale, held up for emulation at the same time he is condemned. The *banditti* of the classic Gothic are replaced by Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard, Claude Duvall and so on. The influence of the Newgate Calendars and the Newgate Novel is everywhere.
6. Where the classic Gothic is placed in a vague medieval or Renaissance past, in a far country such as Italy or Languedoc, the Dreadful is overwhelmingly set in England, and in the present. The historical tale is still popular, again following Scott and Ainsworth. “True” crime is very popular, the highwaymen and robbers of the Newgate Calendars especially so, re-written to make them heroes or victims. The sense of history is appalling or absent.
7. The heroes tend to be far younger in the Dreadful. The villain-heroes are often children (as in *The Wild Boys* type of story) and usually from the same social background as the expected readership. The villain is also designed to appeal to such a reader: often s/he is a cruel apprentice-master or step-parent (as in *The String of Pearls* and *Mary Clifford*).
8. The ethos of the Dreadful changes from Sensibility to Sensation. The Gothic was in thrall to Burke’s theory of the Sublime; Radcliffe, especially, spent chapters on end describing how her fainting heroine was consoled by scenery. Strong emotions are imputed to the heroine, most often without being evoked in the reader: as in H.P. Lovecraft we are told to be frightened, rather than the author scaring us. The horrors that provoke these feelings turn out to have a rational explanation. Lloyd’s work-children would not stand for this. To them a page without a murder was



a wasted page, and none of Lloyd's pages were wasted. Learning from the chap-books and from the *Blackwood's* type of story, where writers would give their "true-life" account of being buried alive, hanged, etc., the Dreadful piled on incidents and terrors, without all that scenery-and-sentiment padding. To manage this over 200 to 800 pages they resorted to subplots and sub-subplots; often, as in *Varney the Vampyre*, the author has no idea how to resolve them. It doesn't matter: it is the constant renewal of sensation that is the core of the Dreadful.

The more demotic register of the narrative combines with this Sensationalism to create an immediacy seldom found in the older Gothic. The distance between the reader and the horror is diminished, if not abolished. Real sightseers flocked to the real sites of these imaginary tales, to the delight of local tradesmen. The common habit of claiming that a Dreadful was based on a "true case" meant that many people "remembered" the original happenings, and embroidered them, and even the staid *Notes and Queries* reports these "facts," fifty years later. Summers, of course, believes them all.

Pure Gothic of the old school still appeared (for example Lloyd's *Vileroy; or, the Horrors of Zindorf Castle*), though sometimes it is disguised: there are few books more rigidly Gothic than *Oliver Twist*, with its lost heir, banditti, and so on.

Apart from being written for adults, Stoker's novel shows most of these Dreadful habits. The main register of his narrative is certainly not Gothic, but the many outcries and apostrophes to which Mina and Jonathan give vent point us back to it, just as the Dreadfuls do. His style is not that of his contemporaries, such as H.G. Wells or even M.R. James. His characters are the right type for the Dreadful – young, professional middle-class: significantly, the one aristocrat in his team, Arthur Holmwood, is the one in whom he shows the least interest. There is no lost heiress, but a definite villain to be destroyed, indeed a monster, of a sort found rarely in either 1790 or 1890, but common in 1840. There is a distinct feminine presence: many if not most of the eerie, thrilling parts are given to Mina and Lucy. The here-and-now is powerfully present. Most of all, one of the glories of *Dracula* is the way in which the character-narrators open up their feelings for us, describing their terrors, revulsions, confusions in true *Blackwood's* immediacy. If anything marks out *Dracula* as a Dreadful, it is this.

It might seem a minor point, but the Count is a typical cruel employer, in the finest tradition of Sweeney Todd and Elizabeth Brownrigg, apprentice-mistress and murderer of Mary Clifford. This has grave consequences: the allies are drawn into the Horror in the ordinary course of their lives and trades, as underlings and employees.

### **The secret world**

One striking feature of both books is the creation of a disturbing secret geography for London. Todd and the Count are lurking, stalking creatures, like universal spiders that have their web, and spread it almost unseen around their victims. The presence of this world, once known, alters our perception of our own world, making it a frightening place. In the 1840s, for many people, this new world was fast becoming a reality, and there was little they could do about it. The wonderful new sewers beneath London's streets did not please everybody. In its simplest and most reasonable expression, the idea of having your home linked to every other home via channels of human excrement was not sweet. The streets of London stank badly enough already, without piping it into the house. The sewers were widely seen as nothing but a conduit for the home delivery of rats, dung and cholera, all to be paid for by the victim. At its more paranoid extreme, Londoners pictured an entire criminal empire growing up down the drains, just as some authors had already pictured it happening in Paris. English authors were not far behind: *Helen Porter, or the Mysteries of the Sewers of London* came out in book-form in 1847, having previously appeared in penny parts. Its author, E.P. Hingston, lived in Paris, and financed a comfortable bohemian life-style by writing for Edward Lloyd. He contributed to the *People's Periodical*, notably the *Confessions of a*

*Deformed Lunatic*, and is a fair candidate for the original author of *The String of Pearls*.

In the 1820s, in the wake of the Burke and Hare furore and the 1831 trial of the London body snatchers and murderers Williams, Bishop and May, it had gained widespread belief that resurrectionists and their doctor clients operated below ground, using trap-doors in the streets to catch their unwary specimens. No less a witness than John Clare reports this paranoia:

... Clare, on his first visit to London from his native Northamptonshire in March 1820, learned some “fearful disclosures” from his city-dwelling friend, artist Edward Rippingille, who described to Clare “the pathways on the street as full of trap-doors which dropped down as soon as pressed with the feet, and sprung in their places after the unfortunate countryman had fallen into the deep hole ... where he would be robbed and murdered and thrown into boiling cauldrons kept continually boiling for that purpose and his bones sold to the doctors.” (Wise 173)

Wise quotes the Nattomy Soup case, where an inmate of Shadwell Workhouse claimed his soup was made of human flesh, having found human bones in it. He was given 28 days in prison for his pains, but it would be astonishing if this were not seized upon by the writers of Penny Dreadfuls, desperate for some new horrors to sell to Mr. Lloyd (173).

The fear of a “secret London” came to its peak in 1868, with *The Wild Boys of London*.<sup>7</sup> Here we see the adventures of a mob of street-children – another folk demon of Victorian times – living a life of criminality in the sewers, indulging in robbery, assault, murder, rape and God-knows-what else, not in order to survive, but apparently out of sheer boyish high spirits. An 1872-3 reprint was suppressed by the police, and led to the passing of the Obscene Publications Act. Its subtitle, *The Children of the Night*, strongly suggests that Stoker had at least heard of it, though the phrase was also the subtitle to Bulwer-Lytton’s notorious 1846 novel *Lucretia; or, The Children of Night*.<sup>8</sup>

Todd’s world is all of these in part, with his own inimitable horrors thrown in. It has three portals: the trapdoor in the barber’s shop, under the infamous swinging chair; the cellar beneath Mrs Lovett’s shop in Bell Yard, where the captive pie man makes the famously delicious meat-pies; and a flag-stone on the nearby Church of St. Dunstan’s, Fleet Street, leading to the cellars in which Todd hides the remains.<sup>9</sup> It would be impossible to provide more than the roughest sketch map of this domain – all the information we have is given above – but it is painted with such vividness that it is a real, uneasy being lying curled beneath the pavement.

A vivid portrayal of reality is a distinctive feature of *The String of Pearls*. Unusually for works of its kind, it is possible to provide an almost exact time-table for the action: it begins a few seconds before 6.45 pm on 19 August 1785, as Lt. Thornhill stands on the pavement on the south side of Fleet Street, directly opposite Old St. Dunstan’s church. From this concrete beginning he enters Todd’s shop, never to be seen again. Todd’s shop has this effect: it is the border between the solid, familiar form of the outside world and the dark, nebulous underworld within. London itself is depicted just as we know it: Tobias is sent to various places such as Carey Street, Leadenhall market, further down Fleet Street, to buy biscuits and so on. But, as if to correct the balance of the formless, he is sent on these pleasant errands only to allow Todd to send another customer into the Gehenna below.

When Johanna Oakley meets Colonel Jefferey for news of Mark, the exact time and place are given: eight o’clock in the evening of 20 August, in the Temple Gardens; en route from her home in Fore Street she passes Todd’s shop, just as she would in real life. When the Colonel and his friend Captain Rathbone keep watch on the barber’s shop, they do so from a coffee shop where

<sup>7</sup> The full title of this anonymous publication was *The Wild Boys of London; or, the Children of the Night. A Story of the Present Day* (1868).

<sup>8</sup> This novel was published at Christmas 1846, while *The String of Pearls* was appearing.

<sup>9</sup> Neatly enough, these portals represent the three chief pillars of Society: Commerce, The Church, and the Law. I am fairly sure this is not intentional.

there really was a coffee shop. When they follow Tobias, on an errand for Todd, they turn the correct way to go where he is going. Many such examples give us such a real London that the unreal hell below it is thrown into an even more awful contrast.

Stoker seems to have been more interested in times, dates and places than ever he was in Transylvanian folklore. Much of his local geography and vampire lore is invented, but on his own side of the Channel he takes more care with details. In this, *Dracula* shows a similarity to *Pearls*: and the similarity is the more striking because, on the whole, and unlike say detective stories, Gothic tales are not famous for their chronology and sense of physical detail. In contrast to this Stoker gives us two formless worlds where horror dwells: one in Transylvania, and another in London.

No proper description is ever given of Castle Dracula: it is approached and entered by Harker in the dead of night, with just the vaguest impression of massive ruins against a moonlight sky; and he does not leave it until he is too weak to make any observations of it. We know the names of certain rooms in the castle, and we know also that there are many rooms where there are “bad dreams.” Later, we discover that the Count has secret chambers, where he rests during the day. Harker wanders the castle looking for a way to escape; never do we get any more than a vague sense of the layout of the place.

Back in London, a London depicted with great care, we start to have the same formless thing forming: Dracula marks out his territory using his boxes. The Monster moves his attention to the middle-class world of late Victorian London, and sets his claws on the fashionable streets of the West End, as well as the humble homes of the East End. If some places are disguised, rather than invented, it is precisely because they are nice middle-class districts that need discrete treatment. Walworth, Bermondsey, Sackville Street, Piccadilly, Chicksand Street are all real places visited in the hunt for the Vampire. Lucy leaves one of her victims on Shooter’s Hill,<sup>10</sup> and prowls Hampstead Heath. The geography of the Heath is exceptionally clear, though the churchyard at “Kingstead” is fictitious. But here is another portal to the formless:

We dined at “Jack Straw’s Castle” along with a little crowd of bicyclists and others who were genially noisy. About ten o’clock we started from the inn. It was then very dark, and the scattered lamps made the darkness greater when we were once outside their individual radius. The Professor had evidently noted the road we were to go, for he went on unhesitatingly, but, as for me, I was in quite a mix-up as to locality. As we went further, we met fewer and fewer people, till at last we were somewhat surprised when we met even the patrol of horse police going their usual suburban round. At last we reached the wall of the churchyard, which we climbed over. With some little difficulty, for it was very dark, and the whole place seemed so strange to us, we found the Westenra tomb. (196)

The effect of this journey from the trivially real and normal into unreal space, in the middle of the so-well-known city (as Van Helsing might have put it), is to create a space for the imagination, where it can do as much harm as possible. In both books, it is one of the frighteners’ most devastating tricks.

There is a further point to mention about the secret world: the connection between Todd, Dracula and Jack the Ripper. Nothing whatever being known about the Whitechapel Killer, he presented a blank canvas on which people were free to project their own images without contradiction. Many of these images derived from Sweeney Todd. One chilling illustration of this is the letter received by George Lusk, of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, together with half of a human kidney: “tother piece I fried and ate it was very nise,” said the writer. Compare this with a typical piece of ghoulish humour from *The String of Pearls*:

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<sup>10</sup> Shooter’s Hill is in South-East London, and in 1897 was in Kent. Probably Stoker meant Shoot-Up Hill, a mile or so west of Jack Straw’s Castle; it got its name as a notorious place for highwaymen.

Todd and Mrs. Lovett met now with all the familiarity of old acquaintance.

"Ah, Mr. Todd," said the lady, "how do you do? Why, we have not seen you for a long time."

"It has been some time; and how are you, Mrs. Lovett?"

"Quite well, thank you. Of course, you will take a pie?"

Todd made a horrible face, as he replied,—"

"No, thank you; it's very foolish, when I knew I was going to make a call here, but I have just had a pork chop."

"Had it the kidney in it, sir?" asked one of the lads who were eating cold pies.

"Yes, it had."

"Oh, that's what I like! Lor' bless you, I'd eat my mother, if she was a pork chop, done brown and crisp, and the kidney in it; just fancy it, grilling hot, you know, and just popped on a slice of bread, when you are cold and hungry."

"Will you walk in, Mr. Todd?" said Mrs. Lovett ... (238)

The Ripper is another cannibalistic monster who cuts his victims' throats and disappears into the London night. Among the myriad theories as to his identity, we may mention: an English lord (most often the Duke of Clarence); a mad doctor (Dr. Stanley); a foreign agent (Dr. Pedachenko); a lawyer (Montague Druitt); a midwife; and one of the cowboys who stayed behind from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which toured Britain in 1887. The allies who hunt down the Count follow this pattern almost exactly: Arthur Holmwood, Lord Godalming; Dr. Seward; Professor Van Helsing; Lawyer Harker; and Quincey Morris. Without going into it too deeply, Lucy Westenra's flightiness in matters sexual and marital link her to the Ripper's victims, as well as to midwives – viewed at the time as little better than prostitutes themselves.

### **Other Dreadfuls and *Dracula***

No story has one model. Christopher Frayling has pointed out that the Clara Crofton episode of *Varney the Vampyre* is the origin of the terrible appearance of Lucy Westenra at her tomb, and indeed that the author of *Varney* introduced many of the developments in the vampire legend that Stoker would use later (see 145-62). There are more links than this between the Count and *Varney*. Flora Bannerworth, heroine of the first strand of the novel, is bitten by Varney, and he pursues her just as the Count does Mina. We have the same grouping of chivalrous men around her, including a doctor, and the same lover returning from a journey. Mr. Marchdale performs much the same function as does Van Helsing (though he turns out a villain) and the visit to the Bannerworth family vault in Chapter VII also prefigures the visit to Lucy's tomb.

There is also an interesting semantic field operating between *Varney* and *Dracula*. The successful suitor to Lucy is Arthur *Holmwood*. The early chapters of *Varney* are set near Winchester (not Yorkshire, as Frayling inexplicably says) near which is the town of *Ringwood*; a little farther away is Godalming. In a later incarnation, Varney's body is washed ashore and revived, and he sets his eye on Clara Crofton – to her doom. Clara's grieving fiancé is John *Ringwood*. *Holmwood* means an oak-wood; the heroine of *Pearls* is Johanna *Oakley*, which means an oak-grove. These are the sort of thoughts that lurk in the mind for years, released almost by parapraxis much later. Which came first, and reminded Stoker of the others, I cannot say; but they are all present. Perhaps it was the same seething subliminal memory that served him up *Pearls*.

I have mentioned *Mary Clifford; or, the Foundling apprentice girl. A tale* by T.P. Prest. The sadistic child-killer Elizabeth Brownrigg was a midwife, employed mostly by the parish of St. Dunstan's in the City of London, and living in Fleur-de-Lys Court, just round the corner from the supposed site of Todd's shop in Fleet Street. One of the scandals of the case was that the parish authorities were told of her brutalities, yet continued to apprentice young girls to her. Just before

Mary's death her step-mother tried to see her, but was not allowed in the house. The authorities came, but did nothing when they got there. The *Newgate Calendar* refers to her step-mother as her "mother-in-law," just as Charlie Green does in *Pearls*. The case has many resonances with *Pearls*, even if Prest's treatment of it distorts the facts in the cause of entertainment.

### **Conclusion: The Children of the Night**

Whatever the influence on *Dracula* of dressed crab, whatever pressures were released from Stoker's libido, and whatever he may have gleaned – but so rarely used – of Central European legends, the plot of his novel was found in another book. I am not saying he did it deliberately: how would we know if he did? Neither am I saying that the execution of the two works is similar: they are worlds apart. But the resemblances between the two are so striking that I believe there is a strong case for the latter as a major, if not the main, model of the plot of the former.

I have used the word "model" and avoided the word "source"; they are entirely different things, and much of the confusion over *Dracula* stems from forgetting this. A source is something a historian uses, remaining faithful to it and acknowledging it as part of his background. A model is far looser, being something a writer may – should – play with as much as possible, and which need not always be acknowledged. The Dreadful in general, and *The String of Pearls* in particular, are not sources of *Dracula* but rather models Stoker used to structure and fill out his tale. The liberties Stoker takes with them are the duty of the writer to do something original with what others have left behind.

*Dracula* is a work of fiction, and it comes from other works of fiction. When Stoker looked for characters and styles he found them where you would expect him to find them, in a Dreadful novel of terror; and when he looked for a plot, he found it in his childhood reading, at night, furtively by candlelight for best effect, in the pages of a scurrilously printed, beautifully written Penny Dreadful. *Dracula* and his nemeses are the children of Stoker's night.

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